

# Roadsides

An FHWA Quarterly Newsletter for Roadsides Decision-Makers

Volume 10, No. 2, Summer 2003

*This issue is devoted to: the Prairie Passage Partnership*

## PIONEERING PARTNERSHIPS

By the end of the twentieth century, rail-road and highway rights-of-way were often the only place to find remnant native prairie. In the late 1970s and early 1980s surveys to identify locations of native grasses and wildflowers were conducted along several active and abandoned railroad and highway rights-of-way in Minnesota. Several segments of high quality remnant prairie were identified. Encouraged by Mrs. Lyndon "Ladybird" Johnson's emphasis on roadside beautification and her love of wildflowers and Mrs. Johnson's life long friends, Dr. and Mrs. Jim and Ida Mae Cain, in Rochester, Minnesota, in 1983 roadside wildflower enthusiasts in the North Star State proposed a national prairie wildflower route connecting the two states. The idea was slow to take root taking a detour before it eventually did.

In 1987 upon the suggestion of roadside prairie enthusiasts, Minnesota's then Lt. Governor Marlene Johnson appointed a Wildflower Task Force charged with identifying potential wildflower routes and opportunities to plant natives grasses and wildflowers along roadsides. In their report to the Governor the Task Force recommend-

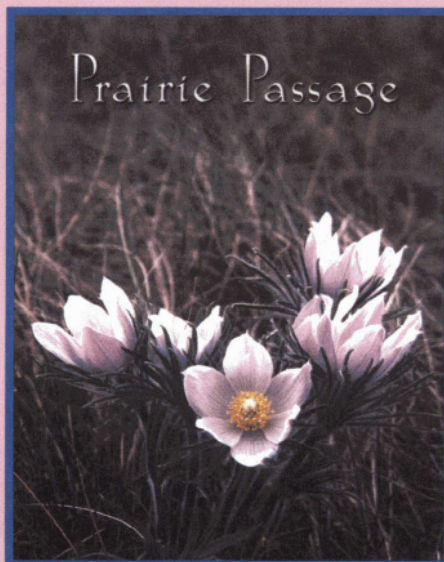


*Mrs. Johnson encouraged this kind of partnership!*

ed that a national prairie wildflower route be considered. The report was circulated throughout numerous states and agencies.

In 1993, Oklahoma contacted the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Native Wildflower Program and asked to explore the concept of connecting our borders with a wildflower route. The States of Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and

Texas met with the FHWA in 1994. This group coined the name "Prairie Passage," conducted surveys to identify a potential route or routes, proposed management actions and as the saying goes, the rest is history. For the rest of the story, read the many articles in this edition of Greener Roadsides.



*A popular postcard from the prairies.*

### CONTENTS

Proactive Prairie Partner . . . . .	Page 3
A Catalyst for Change . . . . .	Page 4
Prairie Passage USA Sites. . . . .	Page 6
A Guide to Minnesota. . . . .	Page 8
Roadsides and Railroads . . . . .	Page 9
Prairie Passage, Missouri . . . . .	Page 10
Tourist Shown Heritage in Iowa .	Page 11

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## PIONEERING PARTNERSHIPS CONT.

In a pioneering partnership Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas were funded by the Federal Highway Administration to develop a plan for a national wildflower corridor. The effort promotes awareness of natural and cultural resources and encourages the protection and planting of native wildflowers and grasses along roadsides. Prairie Passage states identified a network of signed routes following interstates and highways to related natural, historic and cultural sites across the prairie landscape. Each state's plans to implement the Prairie Passage program varies depending on that state's resources and routes. Plans include:

### PROTECTION

- Remnants of native grasses and wildflowers are being protected along many segments of highway right-of-ways. A variety of management techniques are being explored and used such as biological controls for problem species to educe mowing and the use of herbicides. Signs have been created to identify environmentally sensitive areas and prescribed burns are being conducted on selected segments where traffic control and safety issues can be managed.

### RESTORATION

- Native grasses and wildflowers are being planted along many segments of right-of-ways. These provide beauty, wildlife habitat and erosion control. Once established native vegetation is proving to be more cost effective than many of the non-natives planted frequently in the past.



*The partnership in 1997: L-R, Fred Markam, Stacy Armstrong, Terry Cederstrom (National Park Service), Laurie Stillings, Joanne Orr, Melody Hughes, and Larry Pulchalski.*



*Kathy Bolin unveils the Prairie Passage logo in Minnesota in 2002.*

### PUBLIC OUTREACH AND INFORMATION

- Interpretive signs, roadside kiosks, posters, maps and brochures are being, and have been developed, to help residents and visitors learn more about their prairie heritage and how transportation systems have affected this landscape.

### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Recreation and educational opportunities are being promoted and devel-

oped in several Prairie Passage communities. Nature observation and photography are two of the fastest growing forms of tourism and many of the towns and cities in the prairie landscape are featuring the rare prairie resources in their efforts to increase economic stability.

## WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING ABOUT PRAIRIE PASSAGE IN MINNESOTA?

"This is a fantastic, stunning guide. The concept of this project is mind boggling as a whole. You have captured the cultural and natural history. It (Prairie Passage) is an incredibly fantastic idea! I'm going to share these guides with my colleague in Washington, D.C. who teaches environmental law and historical preservation. It's perfect for his class." *D. Kahn, Regional historian, sociologist and documenter of historic change*

"What a wonderful idea! What a gorgeous guide! What a great addition for our area to use! Please send several boxes!" - *Fergus Falls, MN Chamber of Commerce*

"This is the best thing we've seen for our area. I don't think most of us even know what we have right here in our own back yard. We do have something to be proud of!" - *Marshall County Museum*



# A PROACTIVE PRAIRIE PASSAGE PARTNER

By Joanne Orr, ODOT  
(405) 521-4037

Oklahoma was active early in the creation of the Prairie Passage program, when the working title was "The North Star to Lone Star Wildflower Trail". In 1993, the Oklahoma DOT and Texas initiated correspondence with FHWA in Washington, D. C. which led to two \$25,000 grants for each of the six participating states. This was an immense help as the six states met to explore possibilities, goals, and objectives. The grants funded planning surveys of existing native vegetation, nearby attractions, etc.

Oklahoma funded its Prairie Passage efforts in 1997. Each year since then they have planted native wildflowers along their designated route. Many sections of the route have huge vistas of existing wildflowers, notably the indian paintbrush and tickseed that bloom in the Arbuckles and on I-35 south of Oklahoma City. The Prairie Passage plantings have been intended to supplement existing natural wildflowers. A total of 95 sites have been planted during the last four years. Oklahoma DOT spent \$96,531 on wildflower seed and planted 273 acres on the roadsides adjacent to the Prairie Passage route. All seed purchased were native wildflowers, such as tickseed, Indian paintbrush,



prairie coneflower, plains coreopsis, black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower, showy primrose, and Indian blanket, among others.

Funding for Oklahoma's Prairie Passage program is from the Enhancement portion of the federal ISTEA appropriation. In 1997 \$684,000 was approved for Oklahoma's program. The program includes outreach pieces like a wildflower identification brochure, signage, and community involvement.

In Oklahoma, the main route follows I-35 for 235 miles from the Texas border

to Kansas. A number of side loops are possible, particularly in the Arbuckle Mountains of southern Oklahoma. At Oklahoma City in the center of the state, an alternative route breaks away and heads north-east up the I-44 Turner Turnpike.

The path turns north at Bristow on SH 48 and enables travelers to pass by the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. This noted Nature Conservancy holding has more than

38,000 acres of open range. It is the home of 440 prairie plant species and of a growing herd of bison. It is being carefully managed to keep and restore the site to its prairie origins. The use of fire and buffalo are two of their management tools. Osage County and its neighboring five counties support over 2 million acres of native tallgrass prairie rangelands and pasturelands that are used for ranching, wildlife and recreation. The Prairie Passage route winds thru this part of the state and finally connects with Kansas on US 75. From there it is a direct path to the Flint Hills of Kansas.

Important cultural sites include: Guthrie, a National Historic Landmark with 2,169 buildings, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, and the Woolaroc Museum. Many communities along the way have seasonal festivals, and assorted tribal powwows.





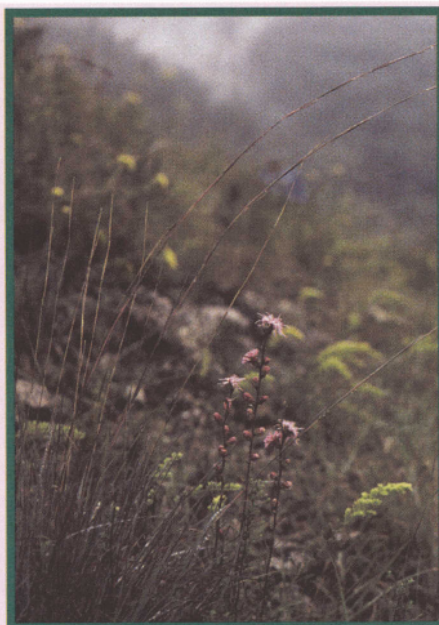
## A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

By Fred Markham, KDOT  
(785) 296-0853

**K**ansas boasts that most of the remaining tallgrass prairie is in Kansas. If that is true today, it may not be true in the near future. The idea of preserving portions of the prairie ecosystem as a significant natural and cultural heritage is not a priority to many land owners, particularly in the eastern third of the state. Strong property right concerns and the pride of managing range land responsibly on large tracks of land dominate opinions in the Flint Hills and in many areas in central and western Kansas. One of the most important opportunities presented by the prairie passage is to communicate the value of preserving the character of tallgrass prairie, particularly along the state's highways.

Although it is difficult to appreciate nature (or culture) on a high speed highway like I-35, the big land/sky character of the Flint Hills, as observed on the Kansas Turnpike about midway between Kansas City and the Oklahoma border, is very evident any month of the year. The Flint Hills is the essence of rural Kansas as illustrated by the many attractions in small towns, including Council Grove, Strong City, Cottonwood Falls, Matfield Green, and Cassoday along the Flint Hills Scenic Byway.

The southeastern loop of the prairie passage enters Kansas from Oklahoma at Caney (US-75) and exits 100 miles northeastward, near Pittsburg. This portion of the corridor passes through hay meadow country. The land here is often wooded, with large, open meadows, often containing a diverse mixture of wildflowers that bloom in the spring through the fall.



*Hilltop prairie survivors.*



*Native roadside remnants.*



*Wetland prairie preserve.*

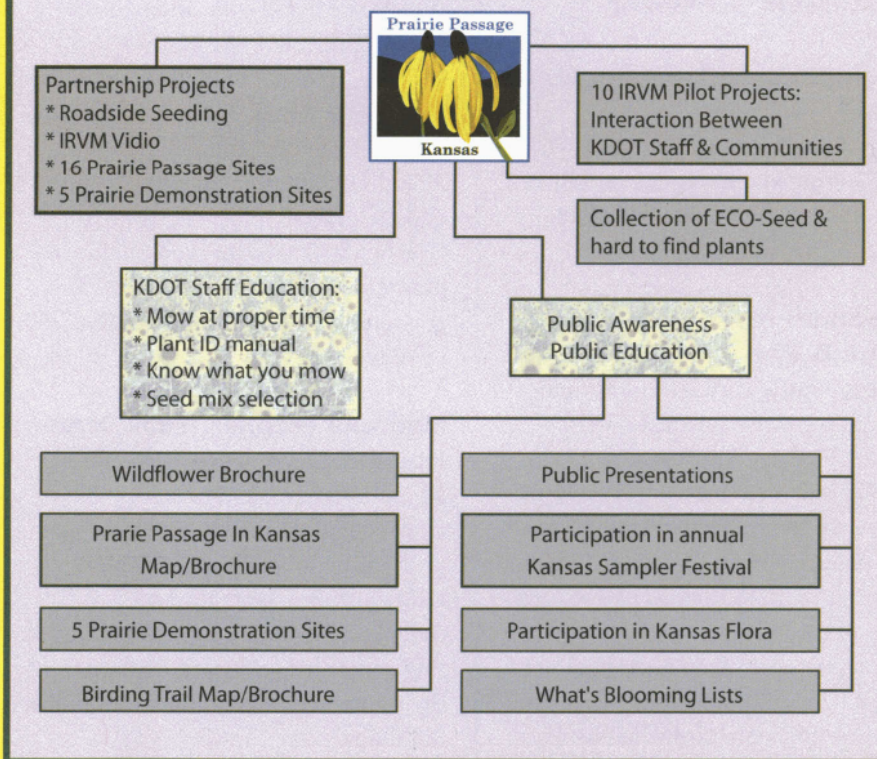
Nearly fifty percent of funds for the prairie passage in Kansas are devoted to educating Kansas and visitors about natural Kansas. Our recent "wildflower" brochure is available at 270 locations and is being requested by teachers, boy scout leaders, Convention and Visitor Bureaus, Chamber of Commerce and Audubon Chapter members.

The Prairie Passage in Kansas brochure will be available in August. A total of 60 attractions, including 16 "not to be missed" prairie passage sites will be listed. Also listed are trail rides, prairie excursions, Flint Hills driving routes, and a list of significant attractions not on the prairie passage corridor.

Prior to the opportunities presented by the prairie passage, the Kansas Department of Transportation did not have goals to implement IRVM programs and did not have anyone who was promoting roadside management. One of our goals was to preserve the native plants we have on our roadsides, rather than planting large areas to a mix of grasses in wildflowers. Past attempts to establish diversified seed mixes were "mowed gone", because our crews did not understand or had not "bought into" the concept of correct mowing procedures during plant establishment and beyond. The prairie passage, along with the need to save money on mowing and redirect the efforts of our maintenance crews to other responsibilities, has acted as an agent to change.



## Prairie Passage A Catalyst For Change



A number of projects came about partly by funding from TE 21 funds and partly from programs supported and developed by partners. In all cases, prairie passage concepts enabled the following additional projects:

- The KDOT is partnering with the Audubon of Kansas on a birding trail brochure and on 10 pilot project areas for Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) sites.
- The development of IRVM sites is included in KDOT's long range plan.
- Management plans are being developed for scenic byway overlooks and other highly visible visitor sites throughout Kansas.
- A video of IRVM in Kansas is being developed by the Scenic Byways program.
- Thirty acres of seeding IRVM sites is included in prairie passage sites. Wildflower signs are also included.

- Five prairie demonstration sites are funded. Partners include the City of Parsons and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.
- An identification manual of native plants included in standard KDOT seed mixes will be distributed to area supervisors. Plant identification field trips (with manuals in hand) will be scheduled.
- Several committees of KDOT maintenance personnel have been organized to meet with citizen groups to develop IRVM management plans for the ten pilot project areas.
- Attend and present an introduction of IRVM at workshops held annually by each KDOT District. We have presented IRVM concepts at two meetings in the winter of 2003, and have received valuable feedback from all levels of maintenance management.

## Roadside Wildflowers

Nature's busy fingers  
Far into the curtained night  
Embroider wildflower motifs  
For man's pure delight,  
Using as her palette  
Colors of sun and sky,  
Bedazzling with her vivid hues  
The awestruck passerby.  
Life's bouquet unfolding,  
Harbinger of change and time,  
Entangles plants and flowers  
With man's ever-living rhyme.  
Wildflowers of the roadside,  
Give to us the clue.

Assault us with your colors,  
Let us your strength imbue.  
Share your verve and beauty,  
Release the soul from strife  
Teach us to forever heed

The poetry of life.

- Bette Woolsey Castro

Austin, TX 1991



## PRAIRIE PASSAGE USA SITES



**IOWA**—Prairie Passage  
Coordinator: 515.239.1424

**Hayden Prairie:** Located near Lime Springs east of I-35 near Minnesota/Iowa border. The largest black soil prairie in Iowa. Shooting star and prairie smoke put on a spectacular show in late May.

**Lime Creek Nature Center:** Mason City. Hours vary, 641.423.5309  
A conservation education facility on 400 acres with walking trails, restored prairie and a nature center feature displays

**Fossil & Prairie Park: Rockford.** Open 6 am to 10:30 pm year round, 641.756.3490  
A 400 acre park along the Winnebago River with Devonian fossils; 80 acres of native prairie and historic beehive kilns. Fossil and Prairie Center.

### **Fort Museum & Frontier**

**Village:** Fort Dodge. Open 9 am to 6 pm daily May through October, admission, 515.573.4231

1862 military fort and frontier town with 12 original and replica buildings. Museum displays American Indian, pioneer and military artifacts.

### **Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge & Prairie Learning**

**Center:** Prairie City. Auto tour and trails open sunrise to sunset daily, 515.994.3400

One of a few national wildlife refuges devoted to the prairie landscape and its interpretation. More than 5,000 acres have been reestablished to native Iowa prairie plants. See wildlife, native flowers and grasses, buffalo and elk along the auto tour and foot trails. The learning center has state of the art displays.

**MISSOURI**—Prairie Passage  
Coordinator: 573.751.8647

### **Dunn Ranch & Pawnee River:**

North of Bethany. Intersection of Route M and D, west of Eagleville. 660.867.3866

Nearly 3,000 acres of high quality prairie supporting wide variety of grasslands birds and other prairie wildlife.

### **National Frontier Trails Center:**

Independence. Open year-round, admission, 816.325.7575  
Only museum and interpretive center in the U.S. devoted to the Oregon, California and Santa Fe Trails. Independence was an important outfitting center for westward expansion of the prairie. Many significant historical buildings.

### **Missouri Town 1855:** Blue

Springs. Open year-round; times vary, admission, 816.795.795.8200  
Living history/village museum with original structures.

### **Prairie State Park:**

Liberal. Open year-round, 417.843.6711  
One of the state's largest remaining tallgrass prairies. It's 3,300 plus acres harboring over 150 species of birds and at least 25 rare species of plants and animals. Visitor Center with interpretive displays, hiking trails, and back-pack camping. Bison roam freely in parts of the park.





**KANSAS**—Prairie Passage  
Coordinator: 785.296.0215

**Prairie Center:** Olathe. Open daily, dawn to dusk, 913.856.7669  
There are six miles of trail through this 300 acre native tallgrass prairie and woodland nature area.

**Ivan Boyd Prairie Preserve:**  
Baldwin City. 785.594.3200  
The narrow swaths of grass within the 40-acre preserve that are just a bit lighter in the shade than their surroundings mark the wagon tracks of the old Santa Fe Trail. A "Survey 1825" monument marks the trail.

**Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve:** Strong City. 620.273.8491  
Located in the heart of the Flint Hills, this 11,000 acre prairie is managed by the National Park Service and interprets a significant portion of the cattle ranching heritage of the Flint Hills. hundreds of different native prairie birds, plants, reptiles, amphibians and mammals can be found here.

**Kansas Turnpike:** Emporia to Cassoday.  
Enjoy undisturbed beauty of the many miles of rolling hills and unobstructed views of land and sky as you drive this scenic stretch through the heart of the Flint Hills.

**Little House on the Prairie:** Independence. Open April 15 to October 1, donations accepted, 620.331.1890  
The actual site of The Little House on the Prairie is today as when Laura Ingalls Wilder and her family lived here, a tranquil prairie setting surrounded by rustling grasses. A one room school and early post office have been relocated from nearby sites.



**OKLAHOMA**—Prairie Passage  
Coordinator: 405.521.4037

**The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve:**  
Pawhuska. 918.287.4803  
A 35 mile long scenic route on country roads takes you through this 38,600 acre preserve where bison roam free once again. Their are four scenic turn outs. This site offers a gift shop, nature trails, picnic area.

**Woolaroc Museum:** Bartlesville.  
Admission, 1.800.636.0307  
Country retreat of Frank Phillips, pioneer oil explorer, features a museum, Indian heritage center, rustic lodge, wildlife preserve and nature trail.

**Gilcrease Museum:** Tulsa. Hours vary, 918.596.2700  
One of the world's largest collections of American Western Art.  
Relates America's pre-history, settlement and western expansion.

**Chikasaw National Recreation Area:** Sulphur. 580.622.3165  
There are year-round recreational activities. Forests and prairies reward hikers, wildlife photographers and campers. Streams and lakes cater to boaters, swimmers, anglers.

**TEXAS**—Prairie Passage  
Coordinator: 512.416.3084

**Parkhill Prairie Preserve:**  
Mckinney. Located 50 miles NE of Dallas  
This preserve is one of the few remnant tallgrass prairies in Texas.

**Lady Bird Johnson National Wildflower Center:** Austin.  
Tuesday to Sunday, 9 am to 5:30 pm, 512.292.4200  
Visitor center, exhibits, gift center, research display gardens, landscaped areas and themed gardens. The center is committed to the preservation and establishment of native plants in all ecosystems nationwide.

## MANITOBA, CANADA—

At present there is no designated Prairie Passage Route extending into Manitoba. However, interested organizations are pursuing the possibility of a signed route.



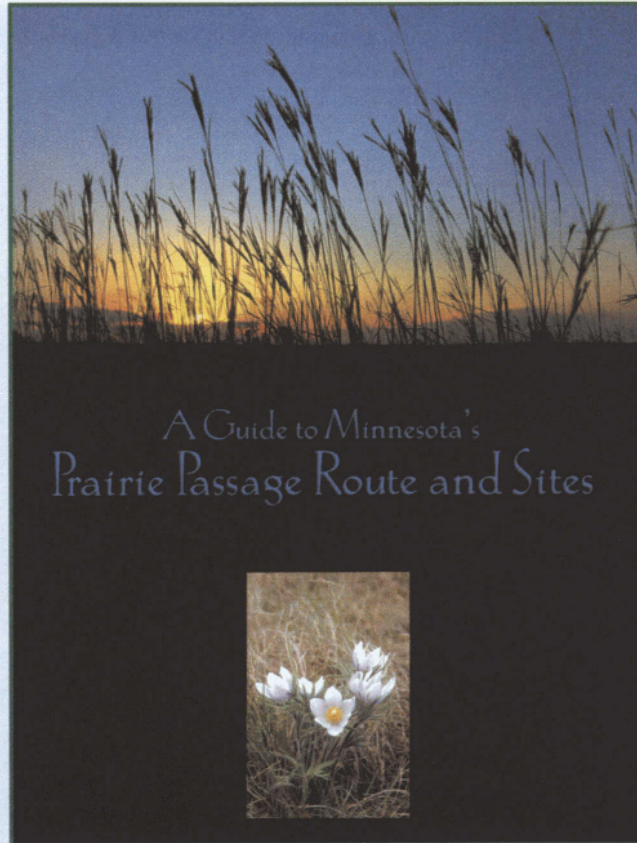
# A GUIDE TO MINNESOTA'S PRAIRIE PASSAGE ROUTE AND SITES

By Kathryn E. Bolin, MnDOT  
(651) 284-3767

While highway and railroad right-of-ways have sometimes protected remnants of native prairie, transportation systems and agricultural development contributed to much of the loss and fragmentation of the North American Tallgrass Prairie Ecosystem. Today less than one percent of the original tallgrass prairie can be found in scattered remnants across the landscape. Most residents of and travelers to the prairie states have little understanding of this once vast ecosystem, which was home to hundreds of different species of birds and animals and thousands of different species of plants, grasses and insects.

Roots of the prairie's grasses and wildflowers can reach 16 feet and more into the earth. These roots helped create the soils that earned the heartland of the United States the title "Bread Basket of the World."

The Prairie Passage Route through Minnesota was identified in a series of right-of-way surveys and public meet-



*One of the guides to the six-State Prairie Passage.*

ings. The signed route in Minnesota travels through the western part of the state that was once covered with over 18 million acres of tallgrass prairie. Remnant prairie can be found along segments of this route. It is hoped that in the future as opportunities arise through highway renovation or other activities, segments can be planted with native grasses and wildflowers. Over thirty natural, historical, cultural, and

archaeological sites have also been identified and most are signed as of this printing. Sites were identified by land managers and others for their significance in telling the stories of the tallgrass prairie across the "passage of time and the landscape." It is the hope that visitors along the route and to the sites will discover stories of the past, the present and the future, as deep and rich as the prairie soil itself.

In 1999 the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) and the FHWA TEA-21 provided funds to create a national logo and signage for Prairie Passage; planting native grasses and wildflower along segments of TH 23 and 75 including several

hundreds of acres in Camden and Blue Mounds State Parks adjacent to these right-of-ways; and the creation of interpretive trails, brochures, guides, posters, and information kiosks. Minnesota DOT was awarded First Place in the 2002 Federal Highway Administration Photo Opportunity Award for Public Outreach for A Guide to Minnesota's Prairie Passage Route and Sites.

## THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF PRAIRIE PASSAGE PLANTINGS

by Robert Jacobson, MnDOT  
(651) 284-3767

Questions regarding the cost effectiveness of using native grasses instead of common non native species continue to surface. Minnesota

Dept. of Transportation has been using native grasses and forbs (wildflowers) in roadside planting mixes on new construction and reconstruction projects for several years.

Recently MnDOT looked at the cost benefits of managing for natives vs.

turf vs. forage species. Costs of seed mixes, establishment, and both short term and long term maintenance costs were looked at. Maintenance activities included mowing, spot spraying, burning, fertilizing and spraying. The costs for native prairie seed mixes can be \$150 per acre more than the forage

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11



## ROADSIDES AND RAILROAD RIGHTS-OF-WAY: RIBBONS OF WILDFLOWERS, NATIVE GRASSES AND RECREATION

By Kathryn E. Bolin, MnDOT Prairie  
Passage Coordinator

When the first cross country railroads were built in the mid 1800's, more than one million square miles of native grasses and wildflowers covered the heartland of the United States. Following the construction of these railroads, the disturbed soil was 'naturally' reseeded by the native grasses and wildflowers surrounding the tracks. Decades later, highways were constructed, often following railroads and sharing a common right-of-way. These right-of-ways often protected

remnants of the original, or native, tallgrass prairie, sometimes called ribbons or corridors of wildflowers. In some states highway and railroad right-of-ways are home to rare plants. This is the case in Minnesota where both federal and state listed plants are found along highway right-of-ways.

The federal listed prairie western fringed orchid and the state listed shooting star are both found along a right-of-way in southern Minnesota. The shooting star population is the only known location for this species in Minnesota. The communities along this stretch of highway actively pro-

mote and protect this ribbon of remnant prairie. A 16 mile stretch of the highway was designated as Minnesota's first State Wildflower Route, The Shooting Star Wildflower Route, in 1989. Several years later this stretch was included in a longer segment of highway as a State Scenic Byway. Signage depicts the shooting star which is also represented on street banners hanging in each of the four towns along the way. In 2002 the second segment of the Shooting Star Bicycle Trail was dedicated. Like many other bike trails around the country, portions of the Shooting Star Bicycle Trail are constructed on the abandoned railbed.

*...the black prairie soil was built by the prairie plants, a hundred distinctive species of grasses, herbs, and shrubs; by the prairie fungi, insects and bacteria; by the prairie mammals and birds, all interlocked in one humming community of cooperations and competition, one biota. This biota, through ten thousand years of living and dying, burning and growing, preying and fleeing, freezing and thawing, built the dark and bloody ground we call prairie. Our grandfathers did not, could not know the origin of their prairie empire. They killed off the prairie fauna and they drove the flora to a last refuge on railroad embankments and roadsides.*

*Aldo Leopold, Round River, 1953*



# PRAIRIE PASSAGE, MISSOURI-STYLE

By Stacy Armstrong  
MoDOT, (573) 751-8647

**P**rairie passage-related projects in Missouri are as diverse as our roadsides and they help promote awareness of our natural and cultural resources. Here is a sampling.

**Inventory:** The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) identified the primary Prairie Passage corridor in Missouri as Interstate 35 from the Iowa border to Kansas City with a secondary corridor, U.S. Highway 71 south to Joplin. Various options for alternative routes and side trips are being considered. The first step after the Prairie Passage partnership began was to identify area remnant prairies. Next, through the support of the Federal Highway Administration, existing vegetation was inventoried. Noted were noxious weeds, tree and shrub cover, legumes, wildflowers and potential planting sites. As expected, few native plant communities remain along Interstate 35.

**Seed Plots:** MoDOT with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), Missouri Department of Corrections, and the Nature Conservancy joined in an effort to increase the availability of native Missouri wildflower seed in northwest Missouri. Wildflower seed was collected from area prairies and grown into plugs. The plugs were then transplanted to seed production plots on Interstate 35 near Bethany. The seed



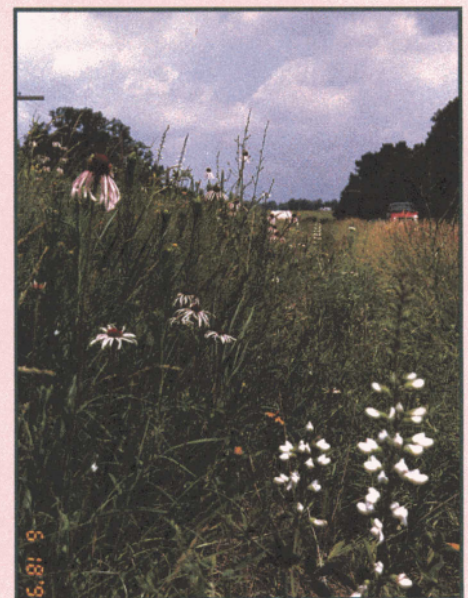
*Planted grassland.*

will be harvested and shared by agencies to replant prairies. Not only will the agencies benefit from the increased seed supply, but the traveling public will be able to enjoy the colorful roadsides.

**Contractor Training:** Grow Native!, a MDC program encourages the use of native flora and helps Missouri native plant growers market their products. In cooperation MoDOT sponsored a two-day roadside contractor training. More than 80 contractors, seed producers and native plant enthusiasts learned about State contracting procedures, native plant establishment and how to develop a native plant contracting business. A trade show featured the latest equipment, products and services available. Attendees shared tales of success and failure.

**Conversion Project:** Recently, Prairie Passage in Missouri took a huge leap forward thanks to a partnership with MDC. One of MDC's goals is to increase the diversity of Missouri vegetation by restoring native plant communities. Through the use of Transportation Enhancement funds, with MDC providing a 20 percent match, selected non-native vegetation areas will be converted to native vegetation to beautify, control erosion, and reduce invasive plants. Greater consideration was given to areas close to Prairie Passage. The future of Prairie Passage looks

bright as additional resources become available.



*Protected prairie.*



## *Gorgeous in the Ditch*

*Mabel went home and called Dorothy:*

*You've got to get out here!*

*These flowers are gorgeous in the ditch.*

*Blue flags*

*Growing in the wet places*

*Along this country road,*

*Just a wildflower*

*Gorgeous in the ditch.*

*Dorothy, get out here right away.*

*Knowles said*

*We've got to go home and call Joanne,*

*Tell her to get out here right away,*

*Bring her camera.*

*Wild Indigo Trail near Brownsdale*

*Is blue flagged.*

*Gorgeous*

*Along the old railroad bed*

*Next to the hoary puccoon,*

*The golden Alexander, the wild campion*

*And the little aspens talking, quivering,*

*Urgently whispering.*

*Just an old railroad right-of-way*

*Just a wildflower*

*Gorgeous where the tracks were in 1869*

*Joanne, you've got to get here right away.*

*Betty J. Benner  
Austin, MN 1996*

## TOURISTS SHOWN NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN IOWA

*By Mark Masteller, IDOT*

Historic vegetation maps generally show Iowa as the only state that falls totally within the tall-grass prairie region of the United States. Interstate 35, which bisects the state in a north/south direction, is the backbone of our Prairie Passage efforts. The Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) inventoried an area that extends approximately thirty miles on either side of I-35. The inventory searched for state and local roadsides containing significant or showy native prairie plant materials, parks and preserves with native prairie vegetation, and cultural/historic sites related to Iowa's prairie heritage.

In 2002, the Iowa State University Department of Landscape Architecture was contracted to analyze this inventory information and develop tourism loop-routes for I-35 travelers interested in prairies. Northern, central, and southern routes were selected to offer

motorist's opportunities to take a short (less than one hour) side trip to view prairie vegetation and learn about Iowa's prairie past. The university prepared a tourism brochure to guide motorists along the routes.

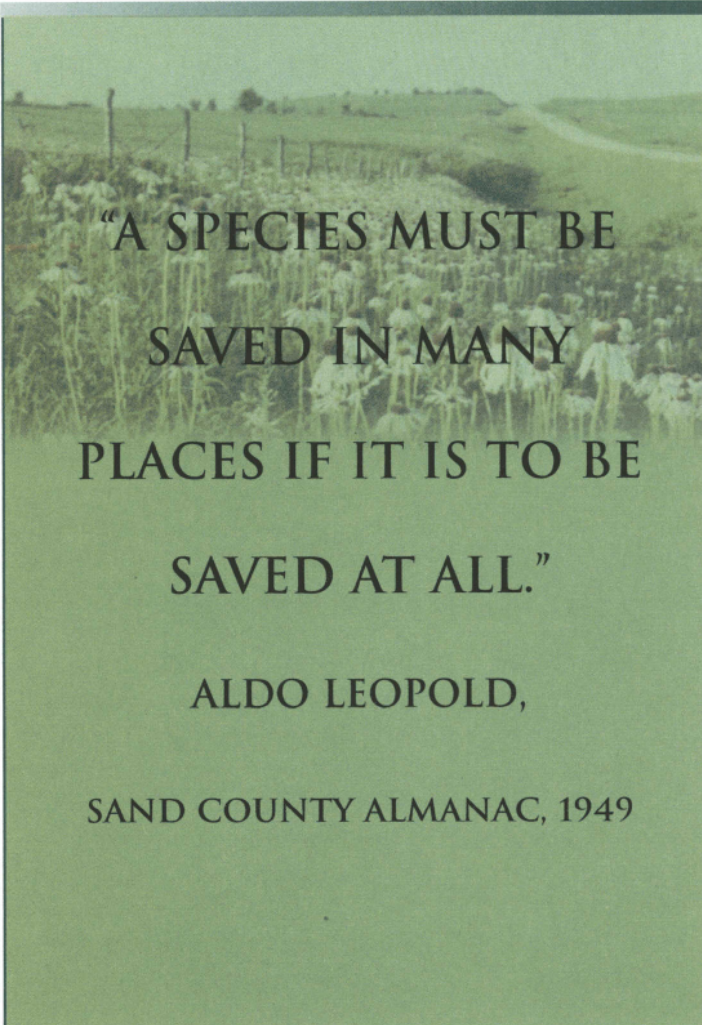
The Prairie Passage program fits well with Iowa's other roadside vegetation programs. We are continuing our efforts to re-vegetate older, non-native roadsides with native prairie species. Since the mid-1980's, it has been our practice to use native prairie species to seed newly constructed rural roadways. The DOT offers a variety of funding assistance to local governments that want to establish native vegetation in roadsides. Iowa also boasts a quality county roadside program that emphasizes use of native species. The recent completion of the Native Roadside Vegetation Center at the University of Northern Iowa strengthens these programs. All of these efforts help add color and texture as well as a historic link to Iowa's roadsides.

### THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF PRAIRIE PASSAGE PLANTINGS CONT.

mix and \$50 more than the turf mixes. However, the total maintenance costs per acre over a 10 year time it costs about half as much to manage for native prairie mixes as it does for forage mixes. Turf mixes are somewhat more costly than native prairie mixes. Cost savings extended beyond ten years were estimated at even greater savings in the native prairie mixes.

The long-term savings in managing natives vs. forage species is significant. Increased benefits of native cover vs. introduced forage species, cover for wildlife, ecosystem health, and water quality, is not easily quantifiable. However, fewer pesticides and less fuel is needed to manage native prairie than other types of cover. These factors alone provide environmental and economic incentives to look at the benefits of growing native.





"A SPECIES MUST BE  
SAVED IN MANY  
PLACES IF IT IS TO BE  
SAVED AT ALL."

ALDO LEOPOLD,

SAND COUNTY ALMANAC, 1949

FHWA's Roadside Vegetation  
Management website may now be  
found at [www.fhwa.dot.gov/roadsides](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/roadsides)

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